

Empowering Our Ministry: God's Many Projects

Luke 9:1-2, 6, 10

[Thomas Michael Smith](#)

CPC 9/10/00

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I want to thank the Chancel Choir for that lovely anthem, rooted in the words of Psalm 51. The Hebrews were asked to sacrifice animals to their God, but the concept of sacrifice tended to get lost, and the people began to think that it was the physical sacrifice, the animal, per se, that pleased God, and that a completely impersonal relationship could be established, so that matters of the heart could be avoided. But of course we know from the whole counsel of God in the Old Testament, that this is not what God wanted; rather, God wants a broken spirit, a contrite heart, a people who yearn to be holy. Thus the words of the anthem, 'create in me a clean heart, O God.' I just want to note that a clean heart doesn't automatically descend on us, but that we, following the lead of the Choir this very morning, must ask. We must ask, we must speak the word, to bring God to our aid, as we seek to have clean and pure hearts.

I've been preaching on the subject of empowerment for our ministry for about a year now. Not every Sunday has had the 'Empowering our Ministry' prologue before the rest of the sermon title, but many of the messages of the past year have been focused in this area. Some of you have understood what I've been saying, and others of you aren't so sure. Yet, this material is so important to who we are as a church of Jesus Christ, that I feel compelled to continue to preach in this arena, even if there is some repetition from time to time.

As I have said before, let me say again, that I believe Jesus is fully God and fully man. In his divinity, Jesus has all the powers and authority of God the Father. But on earth, in the flesh, in the incarnation, the Bible teaches that Jesus gave these powers and this authority up. While on earth, the source of his power and authority came through the Holy Spirit who dwelt within in him from conception and who came upon him at his baptism in the Jordan River, providing power for his ministry to come. While not denying Jesus' divinity, it is yet scriptural to say that while on earth, his divinity was not the source of his power for the 'signs and wonders' he performed. The power source was the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' ministry flowed from an intimate relationship with the Father. Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and had maintained an intimacy in his prayer life with the Father. It was this prayer life that allowed Jesus to know what the Father was about to do at any given point. Scripture is clear as a bell that Jesus didn't have the whole game plan laid out ahead of time, as if the entire schedule for his life was divinely downloaded into his Palm Pilot. Scripture is also clear that Jesus didn't follow his own agenda, but did the will of the Father. How did he know what was the will of the Father? By asking, in prayer. So the Father would present a situation, or lead Jesus, and Jesus would receive a word that he was to do this or that in the name of the Father, utilizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus would then act in obedience, and he would speak the word, often a word of healing, often a word of proclamation of the Good News. Just as the Choir models for us this morning the notion that we should speak the word of *asking* God to create in us clean hearts.

In a real sense, Jesus was in shared ministry with the Father and the Spirit. His prayer life with the Father enabled Jesus to continue to partake in the joyous unity that is the constant of the three persons of the One God, which we know as the trinity. Empowered by the Holy Spirit (1), Jesus maintained an intimacy with the Father (2) and this intimacy led Jesus to this or that task (3) and Jesus spoke the word he was led to speak, to invoke the power of God through the gifts of the Spirit, and people *heard the Word* or people were *healed*.

Today's passage, and others just like it, show that it was Jesus' intention to go one step further, *and invite us to share with him in ministry*. We are to be doing the ministry of Jesus. That's why the church was begun on the Day of Pentecost.

When I speak of the ministry of Jesus, this is what I mean: Jesus' ministry was two fold: (1) Preach the Good News of salvation, the message that God was at work bridging the gap between God and humankind, and (2) Demonstrate the presence of the Kingdom of God. I was taught that the first, the preaching of the Good News, was the main thing for Jesus, and that the doing of miracles, the so-called 'signs and wonders,' were brought forth only in support of the evangelistic preaching, a kind of proof thing so that people might more easily believe the message of salvation IF they saw something miraculous. But I no longer believe this anymore. Scripture has lots of examples where Jesus demonstrates the presence of the Kingdom of God without any evangelistic preaching, suggesting that the Kingdom of God, now present in Jesus, is something very important by itself. Well, not by itself, but it is a 'something,' for it is NEW! The kingdom of God, the reality of the new age, the power of the future, is now present, and Jesus shows that it is present. And our ministry is the same as Jesus' ministry.

The problem has to do with how we generally understand 'time.' I've spoken about this before, that in the scripture there are two words that describe 'time.' The one, *chronos*, speaks to the passage of minutes, hours and days. Chronological. Chronograph. The way we measure time, count birthdays, think of vacations.

The other word is *kairos*, which speaks to the 'right time,' the 'perfect time.' When Jesus said, 'the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand' in Mark 1, he was speaking of *kairos* time. Have you ever spoken with someone and sensed they didn't get what you were saying? Sure you have! Then on another occasion you have been led to speak something to someone, and in this second case, the person is able to hear just exactly what you were saying? As if the person was ready, and it was the just perfect time? That's what I mean. *Kairos* time is like a door opening, a sense of expectancy, a possibility that didn't exist before but which now is present, palpable, evident, unmistakable.

Jesus kept up his intimacy with the Father, and waited for *kairos* moments, those 'times' in which the authority of the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit coalesced in the 'right time,' the time at which Jesus was led to 'speak the word' that would heal or proclaim the Gospel. In such times the Spirit would manifest, and something incredible, and of God, would take place.

Jesus didn't have *kairos* moments during every *chronos* minute of his day. He didn't have a *kairos* experience when he woke up and had breakfast, or attended to the many activities of normal life. Yet these moments attend the stories of scripture. Peter's mother-in-law, Lazarus, the woman with the hemorrhage, et cetera, et cetera, *kairos* moments for God to act in human history, through one who models intimacy with the Father, one who seeks the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

This is what Jesus wants for us! This is why, before ascending to the Father to take up once again his eternal place at the right hand of the Father, Jesus declared that his disciples should hang around Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit,

who would clothe them with power from on high. When the Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, the church was born, and with this Holy Spirit, this person in the divine trinity, who is now Emmanuel = God with us, we can be empowered to do the ministry Jesus asks us to do.

My heart this morning is heavy with a concern, and it is this. I believe God has many projects he wants to do with us, but many of us have been trained to think that God will go about doing this or that without our participation, and this thinking leads us to a kind of passive determinism. I believe that though God can do whatever he wants, he desires to lead us to work with him in accomplishing his glory. To the extent we are there with him in the accomplishment, we see his glory personally, we see the Spirit manifest, and our hearts are warmed, and we begin to share the glory of God, the glory we have seen, with others, with a passion that comes from our personal experience. So, I think God places into our hearts the desire to be intimate in prayer with him, and places also into us a desire to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. God desires that we be sensitive to *kairos* moments, able to see God's plan, and God desires we work with him in a divine-human partnership.

Jesus as in our worship, it is God who is the 'audience,' or the trinity who is the 'congregation,' and we are all ministers, we all participate in worship, so too is the case for ministry, where we all are (again) ministers, seeking intimacy in prayer, seeking to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, waiting upon God for the *kairos* moment, when we too must speak the word, ask, be present. That's our goal and that's how we are to be the church that was called and established two thousand years ago.

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